

ROLL CALL

On Lobby Reform, Congress Can't Legislate Morality

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*By Paul A. Miller,
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I read with great interest your recent editorial "Bogus Reform" and found it to be another in a stream of attempts to paint this issue in the wrong light.

As a lobbyist who has worked very hard this year to ensure that any reforms are real and make a difference, I have to shake my head when I read that the House somehow failed in its lobbying reform efforts. I totally disagree.

I am actually disappointed in both the House and Senate for attempting to pass any reforms. It's not because I don't want to follow the rules, or because I am afraid to comply with any new rules, but rather because there is no evidence the current system is broken. Let's be honest about this: The system caught Jack Abramoff and he is going to prison.

This is not a widespread lobbying scandal. This is about the actions of one lobbyist who, no matter what the rules, would have decided to break them. Congress can't legislate morality.

Any attempt to portray this as anything more is either a knee-jerk reaction or pure grandstanding for the upcoming elections.

If the American people truly are clamoring for reform, then the prudent things to do are, first and foremost, let the Justice Department complete its investigation. Only then can we fully understand the scope of this case.

Second, before we pass legislation, it would be prudent for us to review the current Lobbying Disclosure Act to see what works and what doesn't.

Thirdly, if you want real reform that is going to have meaning, you should allow those of us who live this job every day an opportunity to help you draft a bill that makes a difference.

And finally, before we can even get to this point, we need to figure out how we plan to enforce any new rules — a provision missing from all current lobbying reform legislation.

I know how that sounds. Yeah, right — let lobbyists write their own bill. But if you want real reform, then why not rely on those of us who are practicing lobbyists to help fix any problems in the current LDA. It only makes sense.

If you want any legislation that will be effective, you want Members of Congress to rely on experts in those fields to help. There is nothing wrong with saying it, or for Members to utilize us to craft a bill that will be meaningful for everyone.

Lobbyists aren't looking for loopholes. We want a fair bill that allows us to do our jobs honestly and ethically, but which doesn't place unfair burdens on what we do just because people don't fully understand the value we offer the legislative process.

I think everyone can agree that the abuses in the current case are extreme, but let's not place the burden on an entire profession for the actions of a small number of people. We don't do it for any other profession; why do it here? I am just asking that we place the blame where it belongs and not punish those of us who practice our profession honorably each and every day.

Paul A. Miller is president of the American League of Lobbyists.